EFL SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS' PERCEPTION ON THE USE OF COGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

EFL learners adopt various strategies to speak effectively. Cognitive learning strategies assist them to speak easily and comfortably. The aim of this research was to explore the most frequently used cognitive strategies which were employed by the successful learners of the Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, in their speaking class. In this study, a mixed-methods approach was used to collect the data. The subjects of this research were eighteen (six males and nine females) successful learners. Oxford's (1990) SILL ("Strategy Inventory for Language Learning") questionnaire was employed to collect the data. The interview provided answers to the questions, which was helpful to comprehend the learners' perceptions better and to validate the quantitative data. The completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed descriptively. The result showed that the most frequently used cognitive strategy which the successful learners employed to develop their speaking skills was "I say or write new English words several times" (60%). The next most frequently used strategy was a cognitive strategy "I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English" (46.66%). This was followed by the cognitive strategies "I practice the sounds of English" (40%) and "I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand" (40%). The data will assist learners, teachers and researchers for the improvement of future teaching-learning processes.

1. Introduction

EFL learners adopt various strategies to speak effectively. Cognitive learning strategies assist them to speak easily and comfortably. It is necessary for the language teachers to explore the perceptions of the learners concerning their use of cognitive strategies in speaking performance.

Language learning strategies are "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990: 8). According to Biggs (1988), the objective of cognitive strategies is deep processing and language use. O'Malley and Chamot (1987) maintain that "the cognitive strategies, in which the learners interact with the material to be learned by manipulating in mentally (as making mental images or elaborating on previous

acquired concepts or skill) or physically (as in grouping items to be learned in meaning categories, or taking note on important information to be remembered)". According to Brown (2007), "Cognitive strategies are more limited to specific learning tasks, and they involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself". Oxford (1990) defines cognitive strategies as strategies employed to make others understood and to produce the language, such as "practicing; receiving and sending messages; analyzing and reasoning; creating structure for input and output". Cognitive strategies are the mental strategies which make learners become autonomous, confident, and proficient speakers.

In order to solve problems of learning, good learners utilize their cognitive faculties. Norah and Daniel (2021) define good language learners as highly motivated who enjoy learning a language. According to McDonough and Shaw, "Success is thought to be based on such factors as checking one's performance in a language, being willing to guess and to 'take risks' with both comprehension and production, seeking out opportunities to practice, developing efficient memorizing strategies, and many others" (2003:56).

2. Literature Review

Speaking is a productive skill. Nation and Newton (2009) maintain that speaking is "a part of work and academic study may include presenting reports or presenting a viewpoint on a particular topic." Channey (1998) states that speaking is a procedure which imparts meaning by employing "verbal and non-verbal symbols" in different situations. Eslami *(n.d.)* found in their study that all cognitive learning strategies were effective, but "Semantic Mapping Strategy and Analyzing the Lexical Items Strategy" contributed most to the students' vocabulary learning. The strategy of dictionary use did not contribute significantly to this research.

Researchers have conducted numerous research to determine the students' perceptions of using cognitive strategies in learning speaking. Alang (2017) showed that cognitive strategies have positive effect on the learners' speaking performance. The students use the following cognitive strategies: "practising, receiving and sending, analyzing and reasoning strategy, and creating structure for input and output." The research conducted by Duanyai et al. (2013) showed that the students' capability to speak English increased at 0.05. The cognitive strategies namely repeating, practicing with sound, recombining, and practicing naturally help teachers to assist the students to develop their speaking skills.

Rahmawati, Akib, & Ilmiah (2021) found in their study that for the development of their speaking performance, almost all students employed cognitive strategies. This also makes them confident. Luqman (2020) conducted a study and the findings indicated that 58.04 % students employed cognitive strategies, and 70 % students practiced to improve their speaking skills. The t-test showed that in speaking, cognitive strategies have a positive impact.

The preference of the cognitive strategies of the high-achiever students of Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, has yet to be explored. The result of this study will positively contribute to the development of speaking skills. This might help English teachers to interact with their students while they teach in the classroom, especially in teaching speaking skills.

By knowing these strategies, the students can apply cognitive strategies to enhance their speaking learning process.

The study investigated the following research question: Which cognitive strategies do successful learners of the Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, employ more frequently to develop their speaking performance?

3. Research Method
3.1 Research Design
The aim of this research was to explore the most frequently used cognitive strategies which were employed by the successful learners of the Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. In this study, the researcher used a mixed-methods approach to collect the data. A questionnaire was administered and a semi-structured interview was conducted.

3.2 Population
The subjects of this research were eighteen (six males and nine females) successful learners. The criteria of the successful learners were determined by their last semester speaking final examination test scores (above 80%). The research was held in the speaking class.

3.3 Instruments
Oxford's (1990) SILL ("Strategy Inventory for Language Learning") questionnaire was used to collect the data. The researcher distributed the questionnaire among the students in the classroom. She also conducted the interview, which provided answers to the questions. It was helpful to comprehend the learners' perceptions better and to validate the quantitative data. Six students participated in the semi-structured and informal in-depth interview on use of cognitive strategies which the researcher transcribed.

3.4 Data Analysis
The completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed descriptively. The interview data were analyzed by the qualitative procedure.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1 Results
According to the result of the questionnaire, the researcher analyzed that data to find out the most frequently used cognitive strategies.

No.	Cognitive Strategies	1	2	3	4	5
1.	"I say or write new English words several times."	3	0	1	2	9
2.	"I try to talk like native English speakers."	2	0	3	8	2
3.	"I practice the sounds of English."	2	1	1	5	6
4.	"I use the English words I know in different ways."	4	3	1	4	3
5.	"I start conversations in English."	3	0	6	2	4
6.	"I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English."	1	0	5	2	7

| 7. | "I try to find patterns in English." | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| 8. | "I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand." | 2 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 6 |

Table 1. Cognitive Strategies used by the successful
learners to develop their speaking skills

1= "Never or almost never true of me"
2= "Usually not true of me"
3= "Somewhat true of me"
4= "Usually true of me"
5= "Always or almost always true of me"

Table 1 shows the cognitive strategies used by the successful learners. It was found that the most frequently used cognitive strategy which the successful learners employed to develop their speaking skills was "I say or write new English words several times" (60%). The next most frequently used strategy was a cognitive strategy "I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English" (46.66%). This was followed by the cognitive strategies "I practice the sounds of English" (40%) and "I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand" (40%).

Qualitative Results
The data of the questionnaire was supported by the interview. The quantitative data revealed that the successful learners used specific cognitive strategies more frequently to improve their speaking performance. The most frequently used cognitive strategy was "I say or write new English words several times." During the interview, their expressions were similar.

"Saying or writing continuously helps to keep in memory." (Successful learner 3)

"Repeating several times I can get fluency both in speaking and writing." (Successful learner 1)

"I often write down new English words in my dairy, because it helps to memories and remember for a long time." (Successful learner 6)

The second preferred cognitive strategy was "I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English." The respondents opined in the following way:

"Actually, I love to watch movies. Even English movies' actors' pronunciation, their dress up, get up attracted me very much. In fact English series are really wonderful. For this reason, I watch English language TV shows and movies as much as possible." (Successful learner 5)

"I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in SL to speak like a native speaker." (Successful learner 4)

"Yes, I love to do it because it enriches my knowledge of second language."
(Successful learner 2)

The next preferred cognitive strategies were "I practice the sounds of English" and "I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand." 40% of students always or almost always practice the sounds of English. The learners expressed their opinions in the following way:

"When I converse with my friends and teachers, I try to pronounce standard English." (Successful learner 5)

Another preferred cognitive strategy was "I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand." 40% of students always or almost always used this strategy. They opined in the following way:

"It helps me to internalize the word meaning." (Successful learner 1)

"According to me, this statement is really helpful for me because from my childhood I follow the dividing parts. Actually find the meaning of an SL word by dividing it into parts is really so much necessary for me." (Successful learner 3)

"It is a very easy way to learn." (Successful learner 5)

"It helps me to internalize the word formation." (Successful learner 6)

The findings of the interview showed that the successful learners preferred these cognitive strategies in achieving speaking proficiency.

4.2 Discussion

Based on the data obtained from the SILL questionnaire, it was found that the most frequently used cognitive strategy was "I say or write new English words several times" (60%). The next most frequently used strategy was cognitive strategy "I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English" (46.66%). This was followed by the cognitive strategies "I practice the sounds of English" (40%) and "I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand" (40%).

In practising speaking, the successful learners applied the strategy of repetition most frequently. 60% of learners always or almost always preferred cognitive strategy no. 1: "I say or write new English words several times". Since English is a foreign language, these learners tried to remember a word by uttering the word several times as the word became ingrained in their minds. Whenever they need that specific word during speaking, they can easily recall that very word.

The second most frequently used strategy was cognitive strategy no. 6: "I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English". 46.66% of good learners opined that they always or almost always used this strategy. Since learners had little opportunity to interact with native speakers, this procedure helped them to listen to the native speakers' utterances. The learners developed their speaking expertise through

continuous listening input (TV shows, movies), which enhanced their power of comprehension.

40% of high achievers always or almost always practised the sounds of English (cognitive strategy no. 3: "I practice the sounds of English") to develop their speaking proficiency. To learn accurate pronunciation, learners relied on online audio resources. Class teachers assisted in this case. When the teachers pronounced the words accurately, learners imitated and practised easily.

Cognitive strategy no. 8: "I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand" was always or almost always employed by 40% of proficient learners who took preparation to speak accurately and fluently. They analyzed the parts of an English word to explore its meaning.

Cognitive strategy no. 2: "I try to talk like native English speakers". 26.22 % of high achievers chose cognitive strategy no. 4: "I use the English words I know in different ways" as "Usually true of me". 40% of learners opted for cognitive strategy no. 5: "I start conversations in English" as "Somewhat true of me". 33.3% of students chose cognitive strategy no. 7: "I try to find patterns in English" as "Somewhat true of me".

The interview sessions complemented the quantitative data. The proficient learners have become aware of their use of cognitive strategies.

The findings and discussion presented the kinds of cognitive strategies and their impact on the students' performance. The finding of this research is congruent with Sahan Ahmet (2012) who found that the good learners used cognitive strategies frequently in reading comprehension. Furthermore, this is consistent with the finding obtained by research done by Duanyai et al. (2013), who showed that cognitive strategies are essential for the development of English speaking skills.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that in this study, the successful learners most frequently used the following cognitive strategies: "I say or write new English words several times", "I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English", "I practice the sounds of English" and "I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand". The data will assist learners, teachers and researchers in improving of future teaching-learning processes. Learners will be more aware of their use of specific cognitive strategies and be autonomous learners. Teachers will be more aware of the curriculum to include appropriate cognitive strategies. The researchers will also be able to explore new horizons of research on the basis of these findings.

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